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J. T. SEARCY. THE RELATION OF ALCOHOL TO CRIME IN ALABAMA. HV5053



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THE RELATION OF ALCOHOL TO CRIME IN ALABAMA.

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[From the Transactions of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, 1891.]

PART 1.

Men in the world can be very readily graded as they ascend from the lowest to the highest types, by two very essential qualifications—the one, their degree of intellectual-sense,—the other, their degree of moral-sense.

By the lowest type of man we mean one both ignorant and immoral; by the highest type, we mean one both highly intelligent and highly moral. These two qualifications can, to a considerable extent, be separated. We often speak of the mental and moral qualities as distinct; and we recognize the fact, that in the same individual, frequently, the levels of these two qualities do not correspond. For instance, we can have a person who will grade higher in his ethical sense than in his intellectual, and another whose ethical sense will be lower than his intellectual. The rule though is, capacity to think is accompanied by an equal ethical capacity.

In the gradual advance of a race from savagery to civilization, this progress is occasioned by and marked by gradual improvement in both these particulars.

In any man, his intelligence and his ethics are exhibited at a level corresponding with his ability, which is acquired by practice in performing these kinds of action. The savage, compared with the more advanced man, is less able to perform these kinds of thought, because he has been less practiced in

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them. In human progress upwards through generations to civilization, there is a gradual improvement in ability, until the most advanced man shows his excellence by his high capacity to think and to do right.

The first essential in an advancing race is activity ; an indolent, idle race never advances. It is the activity or exercise of the brain that increases its ability. Accomplishments and excellencies are acquired only by brain practice and exercise.

The rapid competitions of active society necessitate activity on the part of the individual to avoid suppression and elimination. Hence improvement of individuals is most rapid in active society. The continuous brain-work, which under such circumstances becomes a necessity, improves the thinking capacity and increases intelligence.

The intellectual sense of the rising man, therefore, antedates to some extent, his ethical sense. In active society, which alone is the advancing one, competitive ability is acquired before the communal necessity arises for harmonizing the competitions. As civilizing society advances, the safety and the welfare of the community demand that the competitions of its membership shall be harmonized. This gives rise gradually to the evolution of higher and higher rules of conduct. Public opinion and moral sentiment, with laws and government to enforce them, thus become proportionally of a higher and higher grade, as the intellectual competitive ability of the people advances. Closely behind the intellectual level is the ethical—almost concomitant with it.

In the gradual improvement of society the advancing man becomes more practiced in ethical observances, until as an accompaniment to his brain ability to compete, there also grows in him a higher and higher ethical sense of the rights of others. A high ethical sense is the capstone of human improvement—the latest evolved.

In the best communities to-day we find some individuals,—in some localities they are comparatively few, in none do they reach the majority—who have a high order of ethical-sense inherent in them, at the same time they are inherently intel-

ligent. This combination makes the best type of man. He is the result of generations of these kinds of brain action.

We speak of civilized countries, and of civilized communities, as though their memberships are uniform. On the contrary, every civilized community (so-called) furnishes examples grading all the way from the highest type, just described, to the lowest. We can find persons in any community in this country that grade very low, at the savage level, in thinking capacity and in ethical sense. We might style them civilized savages, or rather the savages of civilized society. Many of such persons have the savage level of moral sense, while they hold a higher level in intellectual sense. This is particularly the case with deteriorating or degenerating individuals, they lose their ethical sense in advance of their intellectual—the latest evolved and most delicate goes off first.

We have not yet invented a cerebral dynamometer by which we can test and record a man's intellectual capacity or his ethical strength, but in our associations with others we instinctively know such information is very valuable. It is very important to know the character and ability of those with whom we associate. It is interesting to note how much we are engaged in this sort of work ; we are continually making estimates of this kind, and it is astonishing, in a crude way, how expert we get at it.

In making our estimates in society, the position a person is found to hold is one to which he has risen from a lower level, or one to which he has lapsed from a higher one. Human brain ability, of all kinds, is not a constant quantity—there is no stand-still level—the index of ability rises and falls in the course of the life of the individual ; and it varies in the course of his line of descent. In so-called civilized communities, the lapses probably constitute the large majority of the incompetent classes.

Ability, at whatever level it is in an advancing man, is raised to that height solely by previous brain exercise. Brain strength of all kinds comes from individual or ancestral brain work. The person receives his ability at a certain level from

his ancestry and raises it by his habits of thought. It is either individual practice or ancestral practice that raises ability; and by far the most stable and valuable ability, is that which is the result of generations of ancestral practice, kept up or improved by individual practice.

While it is true there is only one way of improving brain capacity, namely by brain activity, there are several ways of lowering it. There are several ways by which the person can lapse into a lower grade of intellectual and ethical ability. Inactivity, idleness, I have already stated, is the physiological process of lapsing ability. Functional capacity immediately begins to subside when there is a cessation of brain work; this is the physiological method. There are also a number of pathological processes, which impair the functional ability of the brain.

Our pathology is always nothing more than disturbed or impaired physiology, and I have dwelt this long on the physiology of the brain functions because this is necessary in order to fully understand their pathology.

Whatever injures the structure of the brain impairs its functional action—this impairment is exhibited in loss of intellectual ability and in the loss of ethical ability.

We can go through the wards of our insane asylums and find numbers of men who once ranked high in mental and moral qualities now lowered in both. Defect, injury or disease now renders the brain of each of them incapable of performing at as high a level as it formerly did.

Insanity indeed is only a name we give to a certain degree of brain incapacity. As generally defined, it simply means there is such a degree of incapacity as renders the person an unfit member of society; for this reason, for his own or his fellows' safety, he has to be placed under forcible restraint. His brain is so lowered in intellectual ability that he is unable to compete for his living, or conduct his business properly, so a support has to be given him; and so lowered in ethical ability, that he is a nuisance or a danger to others, and has to be restrained.

In society, short of the degree called insane, we have a great many kinds and degrees of peculiar, cranky and delirious people. In all these the brain is more or less pathologically injured or defective in structure. The difference between them and the ^{insane} same is only one of degree.

Besides the long list of diseases, injuries and defects of the brain, which impair its functional capacity, we also have a large number of drugs, which taken into the circulation, bring down the brain's capacity to a lower level. I need not go over the long list nor point out the peculiarities of their actions, but at once mention alcohol as one of them. This agent, from its so universal use, probably next to idleness, does more than anything else to impair brain capacity and produce the lapsed members of society.

If it were not for the fact that alcohol has its principal effect in the system upon the brain, men would never have used it as a beverage. If its effects were confined below the collar men would never drink it. In seeking it and taking it the alcohol drinker is after its brain effect.

The brain is the organ of thought and all conscious feeling. The partially altered condition of its delicate structure, that alcohol produces, renders it less capable of cellular action. Its conscious sensitiveness is lessened thereby. It is less able to feel. The alcoholized man says he "feels better," because if he have any pain or discomfort, his brain has less sense of it; and even, if he have no pain, in a state of health, he has a pleasant feeling, because a benumbed condition is a comfortable one. So, under alcohol, the well man says he "feels good." The luxury of alcohol drinking consists in this brain condition.

I wish to call attention to the fact, that in order to obtain the pleasant brain condition of lowered sensitiveness, the alcohol drinker does not avoid or fail to have the other effects. The comfortable condition is the lowering of one brain capacity, of sensitiveness, but the other functions are lowered with this one. When the brain's ability to feel is lowered, its ability to think and to adjust conduct ethically is also lowered. The keenness of a high ethical sense is probably the first thing blunted.

The disability of the alcohol drinker will vary according to several conditions; first, it will vary according to the amount taken. For instance, in proportion to the amount taken, conscious sensitiveness lets down from a slightly benumbed, comfortable condition to that of complete anæsthesia; the capacity for intellectual thought varies from being "a little off" to the condition of a fool or a temporary dement; the ethical sense is lowered through degrees varying from the exhibition of slight indecorum or impoliteness to the condition of full viciousness or madness. All these capacities can be lowered to any level by increasing the amount of alcohol taken. Secondly, the degree of brain disability will vary according to the inherent brain strength of the drinker. Weak brains will be lowered in ability more than strong ones, and low grade, savage brains, will be lowered more than advanced brains; and defective brains will exhibit their lessened capacities in the lines of their deficiencies. Third, the disability will also vary in proportion to the length of time the brain-abuse is continued. A single debauch can be recovered from, while long continued use produces such a degree of injury that full function is never restored.

All three of these conditions, namely, a large quantity taken, a weak or defective brain, and continued drinking, sometimes obtain in the same person. When this is the case, the deterioration and degeneracy of brain action is extreme. These extreme cases constitute the inebriates. They are always degenerated to a very low grade in intellectual sense and in moral sense. There is a tendency to return to original capacity, if the brain-drug-abuse is left off, but, I question whether there is any inebriate brain which ever rises to the level of intellectual or ethical ability which it would have occupied without the damaging abuse.

As society advances from savage life to civilization success depends less and less upon muscle strength and more and more upon brain strength. The most advanced society pays the highest premium for brain capacity. In active, civilized society, the individual is most interested therefore in his brain

ability, for his safety and his success depend upon this. In savage society muscle strength suppresses the weak, in advanced society it is the brain strength of the competent man that suppresses the incompetent.

The drinking man loses money, lets down in business because his thinking capacity is lowered by his habit—his ability to compete is impaired. He falls into vicious habits, for the same reason, his ethical sense is impaired.

In modern society, brain idleness probably puts most men into the eliminating level—next to idleness, comes alcoholic drinking. The combination of these two agencies, more than anything else, rids crowded society, particularly in cities, of its unfit membership. Alcohol is a terribly rapid eliminator. The least fit persons, both in the wealthy, idle ranks, and in the poor, idle ranks, are most given to its use. The use of alcohol, under the light of advancing science, is becoming more and more confined to the class of the weak-brained and the vicious; the intelligent, for the sake of maintaining their intelligence and superior fitness, are learning to leave it off.

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Society is much interested in the intellectual level of its membership, but it is most interested in their ethical level. The safety and survival of the individual is most dependent upon his intellectual ability. Society's safety and survival depend upon the moral status of its people. The good of society demands morals. The most successful community is that whose membership is mostly composed of a high order of ethical as well as intelligent persons. A race or a nation of this kind will excel and surpass all others. Communities, races and nations, like individuals, compete with each other. The most successful is the one which has the high intellectual capacities of its people welded into a harmonious whole by a high ethical sense. There is a very scientific explanation, therefore, to the fact that the most altruistic persons, those most interested in public good, have always been opposed to alcohol drinking, because they observe it lowers the intellectual and the moral level of the

people. Probably one reason they have never succeeded better in enforcing their opinions upon the attention of the alcohol users, is because they have not had the advantage of most recent scientific knowledge to back their instructions—the brain has been left out of their philosophy altogether. I have often been made impatient in listening to the lecturer presenting the “scientific aspects of the alcohol question” to an audience, to see him illustrate with charts, and spend hours to show the effects of alcohol upon the coats of the stomach, upon the corpuscles of the blood, upon the structures of the kidneys, the liver and the lungs, and never allude once to the brain; when the fact is, alcohol’s chief and principle effect is upon this organ—especially are its effects of great importance on this organ because the brain functions so far transcend those of all the others—I might say there is no comparison.

When a man realizes the fact that alcohol incapacitates the very organ upon which his safety and success in the world depends, he will be less apt to use it; and when society recognizes that with alcohol it can chemically make a vicious man out of its most excellent man, and is continually doing this with its less-fit classes, it will do more to spread scientific instruction upon the subject.

PART II.

The above portion of this paper I had already prepared for another audience when I received a letter from our worthy President requesting me to “report upon the relation of Alcohol to Crime in Alabama.” For reasons I won’t mention here, I reluctantly consented to do so.

On considering the subject, I thought probably the thoroughly scientific standpoint I have taken, and the purely physiological presentation I have made of the subject, would bring it, by this new departure, more interestingly to your attention.

Such a method of approaching the “Alcohol question” to me seems the only scientific and practicable one, and is entirely within the bounds of medical science—although the subject is

seldom discussed from that standpoint, especially its ethical aspects.

I don't think any number of figures and statistics, compiled by circular letters of inquiry to different portions of our state, would alter the general conclusions I have reached ; and I might very properly close at this point with the statement, that all that is necessary is to apply these principles in our different communities.

Examples of brain degeneracy by alcohol exist everywhere in Alabama. Every doctor's practice brings him in contact with these cases. This kind of disability comes under his daily observation in all its kinds and degrees ; from those cases where the person's brain is only temporarily impaired in its intellectual and its ethical capacity by a single administration of the drug, to those extreme cases where its continued use has produced such a permanent injury that fully recovered capacity is impossible ; the person remains permanently low grade.

It is not at all necessary for me to illustrate my subject by individual cases ; any intelligent person can recall numbers of them.

It may prove interesting, however, to enter a broader field and show how alcohol has affected some of the race degeneracies in our state.

We have three very distinct races in Alabama—the Indians, the Africans, and the European whites. I think I can show that alcohol use has had some distinct and peculiar effects upon each of these races.

The Indians have been almost entirely eliminated from our midst, very few of the race remain alive.

It is a very notable fact that not only in our state but nowhere in the country have the Indians been able to succeed in industrial competition with the whites. I have shown, as civilization advances with any race in the upward progress, the competitions of its members become more and more limited to industrial pursuits in which the degrees of brain ability of the different persons determine the results of survival or

ascendency. When a savage race, therefore, is suddenly forced into civilized society, it signally fails because of the want of previous brain practice and sufficient brain capacity in the performance of these kinds of thought. Such a procedure toward any low grade race is equivalent to forcing them to take their position in civilized society at their natural level, which is at the same level as the low grade eliminating members of that society. When the Indians, therefore, in Alabama were forced to confine themselves to the habits of the advanced Europeans, they simply took this obvious course, the only one they could assume, and fell into the grade of the eliminating whites. They necessarily and naturally failed—failed intellectually, in industrial competitive life, and failed ethically in moral observances—in common language, they became poor and vicious.

The vice of the whites to which they took with avidity, was alcohol drinking, because of its temporary comforting effect, and nothing could more effectually have added to their further degeneracy. Such a procedure has put them “down and out” rapidly. Only a few years find them almost entirely eliminated.

The general government in its efforts to manage the Indians finds that it must first stop their alcohol drinking. The rise from savagery to civilization is due to a slow process of brain practice through generations upwards, while brain degeneracy by alcohol is almost traumatic in its rapidity downwards. The missionary finds therefore his efforts to stem the current of downward Indian degeneracy, if alcohol is allowed, to be “like whistling at the wind.” The inherent inability of the brain of the Indian to compete industriously in white society, and the still further disability of that organ that alcohol produces, are the factors that have led so rapidly to his extermination. These are the principle reasons we have so few of this race left in Alabama.

When the Spaniards discovered America they set out immediately to enslaving the Indians. They did this on a large scale, by the hundreds of thousands, in the West Indies. This

change of habits was so extreme and sudden that the Indians were utterly unable to adjust themselves to it. They exterminated so fast, and proved so unsuitable for such a life, that the Spaniards had soon to import Africans, whose submissive habits were entirely different from the Indians—subjection being their almost constant condition in Africa. Their suitability for slavery has always made the Africans the prey of other races for this purpose. Later they were largely imported into this part of the continent as slaves.

During the more than 200 years that the Africans were subjected in the United States to slavery, they were practiced in higher orders of brain-work than they ever performed before. The result of this forced discipline was a gradual elevation in their intellectual and ethical abilities. At the time of their freedom they were much improved in both these capacities over their original level. And, at their freedom, no where else in the world did there exist 6,000,000 of people, who, in a body, excelled them in three particulars—general healthfulness of system, prolificness, and sobriety. They excelled the whites in each of these particulars. The general management and government of them as slaves, incited it is true by the masters' interests, tended to improve them in these three directions. Better general sanitary conditions than they ever enjoyed before, had improving effects.

The negro now, freed from slavery, but still retained in advanced society, being of a more submissive and adjustable nature than the Indian, requires less forcible coercion to hold him, and the change of habits is not so severe upon him, because he is inherently more passive; still, intellectually and morally, he assumes his level. That he fills our police courts, our chain gangs, our penitentiaries and our convict camps is but on exhibition of the physiological and natural rule, that living in a civilization of a higher ethical grade than he is able to make for himself or practice, when forced to live under it, he necessarily falls short in that kind of practice, and in a larger proportion than the whites, occupies the incompetent and immoral grade in society. Natural and artificial "selection" with

miscegenation, have produced individuals among them that rank well and high, who point toward excellent "survival," and ability to compete. Still, it is very apparent that the general average trend of the race has lapsed in level since their freedom. They certainly have declined in the three particulars in which they excelled—of healthfulness, prolificness and sobriety. And, with the scattered exceptions cited, I think their intellectual and ethical levels have let back, especially in the thickly settled negro sections where they have been left to themselves. Aryan civilization and management still continue to help the negro. He is still under the pressure of forced European tutelage. The legislation of the state largely spends itself in negro management. He is recognized as a general incubus upon the industry and the government of the country. The public opinion and the moral sentiment that control legislation and general morals in the state, are almost wholly manufactured, promulgated and enforced by the whites. Negro violators of the peace of society, of the rules of honesty, and of the rules of chastity, are not censured and punished, except to a very limited extent, by the public opinion of the negroes themselves. Their convicts, on return from the prisons or penitentiaries, hold social status among them without reproach. Although much elevated above its original African level, the average, or aggregate ethical sense of the race still ranks low.

Alcohol drinking in those localities where they gain access to it, is on the increase among them. And, as tested by the elections held on that question, if left to their own suffrages, there would be a grocery at every cross-road in the country. If it were not for white legislation to prevent it, much of the same condition of affairs that prevail in portions of Africa to day, would prevail in the negro sections of the South. In south Africa whole tribes have melted away and disappeared in the countries contiguous to the English Cape Colony, largely and much more rapidly because of alcohol drinking. And, if European and American rum, in its rapidly increasing proportions each year, continues to be poured into

these sections as well as the Transvaal and the Sierra Leone countries, they will all be evacuated for European occupation, without the firing of a gun. The same is the case in the new Congo Free State. This condition of affairs has already occurred among similar races in the large islands of Tasmania and New Zealand which for a number of years were English penal colonies. The natives have now entirely disappeared. The same is occurring in the Continent of Australia—the natives are being exterminated like our Indians. These races were all of negro type. Alcohol is the most rapid exterminator of savage and barbarous races yet invented. It serves the same purpose upon low grade races that it does upon low grade individuals in advanced society.

In the "black belt" and thickly settled negro portions of our State, the pecuniary interests and personal safety and comfort of the whites, continue to be the influences that legislate for the negroes good. The prohibitory laws in those portions of the State are better enforced than anywhere else, because the white sentiment that makes them also enforces them. The whites know the wide-spread damage and destruction that follow their omission—their own interests demand their enforcement. The legislation and government of these sections of the State are still largely spent in negro improvement and propagation.

As regards the effects of alcohol degeneracy upon the European white race of the State I need have little more to say. I have already shown its effect in broad generalizations. General information and intelligence is increasing on this subject so as to have greatly stayed the wide-spread deterioration that once prevailed. Within the memory of most of us, alcohol drinking once pervaded all ranks of society. It was constantly used in every house. The two most potent methods of brain degeneracy used to prevail among the whites of this section much more generally than at present—I mean brain idleness, and brain injury with alcohol. Among the wealthy slaveholders these habits were the rule—and they have played sad havoc among what used to be our most prominent families,

Brain deterioration and degeneracy and consequent elimination from these causes, can be traced largely in all our communities among the names of our once wealthy people. But I need not here specialize, individual cases are familiar to you all.

Increasing brain activity over the whole State is now having an elevating effect to bring back the whites to their proper Aryan level, to recover them from the deterioration that the brain idleness consequent upon the institution of slavery once produced. In my opinion, while the negro race was greatly, upon the whole, improved, the white race was sadly deteriorated by that institution. Increased brain exercise and the cessation of brain injury with alcohol, are, on the part of the intelligent people, now doing more than anything else to produce and develop "the new South."

I think I have probably said enough to illustrate and make plain "the relation of alcohol to crime" in the state, and I insist that I have done this from a purely scientific and medical standpoint.

I believe that the heretofore totally neglected subject of brain sanitation is the direction in which, in the near future, there will open up a field for the highest order of public hygiene. Old metaphysical notions and sentimental prejudices have heretofore shut out this field from medicine. We have acted as though the brain had no functions and did not belong to our province of science.

